



SD ANIMAL INDUSTRY BOARD

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West Nile Virus Update

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South Dakota Animal Industry Board

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WNV is following its predicted path and has now been confirmed in horses in all 48 contiguous states. South Dakota confirmed equine cases have gone from 672 in 2002, 71 in 2003 and only 5 in 2004. During those same years, the number of equine West Nile Virus confirmed cases nationally are 15,257 (2002), 5,181 (2003), and 863 (2004).

Extensive use of good vaccine and exposure followed by natural immunity has no doubt led to this decrease in cases. The virus is here to stay and continued vaccination is needed to keep losses to the equine industry minimal.

The South Dakota counties where positive cases were identified in 2004 include Pennington, Brookings, Charles Mix, Minnehaha, and Bon Homme. None of the affected horses had been properly vaccinated against the virus in 2004.

Birds are the reservoir for the virus. Mosquitoes become infected while feeding on infected birds, and then spread the disease when feeding on other animals such as the horse. Horses are susceptible to West Nile Virus encephalitis and the disease can be confused with western encephalitis or sleeping sickness, which has existed in South Dakota in the past. Although horses and mules are primarily affected, the virus has also been identified in a large variety of other animal species seldom showing any signs of disease.

" While only a few horses that are exposed seem to become infected, of those that do, the death rate can be as high as 30 % with little treatment options available. For this reason, horse owners are encouraged to consult their veterinarian and get their horses vaccinated. A minimum of 2 doses at 3-4 week intervals are required for protection," says Dr. Sam Holland, State Veterinarian.